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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [HO](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: TFH01: IMPACT OF THE COUP ON INDIGENOUS AND OTHER
VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1050

[B.](#) TEGUCIGALPA 589

[C.](#) 08 TEGUCIGALPA 662

[D.](#) TEGUCIGALPA 1067

[E.](#) TEGUCIGALPA 1045

[F.](#) TEGUCIGALPA 989

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1.](#) (C) Summary. This is the fourth in a series of cables regarding meetings held by Poloff and visiting DRL Deskoff October 13-20 to obtain a better understanding of the human rights situation in Honduras since the June 28 coup d'etat. A young member of the Garifuna community, Luis Norales, told Poloff and Deskoff that police beat him and used a racial slur when he participated in an October 7 anti-coup protest outside the U.S. Embassy. Two Garifuna organizations, the Development Organization for the Ethnic Community (ODECO) and the Fraternal Black Honduras Organization (OFRANEH) expressed differing views on the call by President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya for a constituent assembly, but both opposed the June 28 coup d'etat. ODECO and OFRANEH also held opposing views regarding allegations that the Honduran military and police have been harassing a Garifuna hospital near Ciriboya in Colon Department. The National Chorti Council of Honduras (CONIMCHH) told Poloff and Deskoff that, like the organizations representing the Garifuna community, they opposed the coup. CONIMCHH said the Chorti community had participated in five anti-coup protests and that on September 27 police briefly detained 13 members of the community during a protest, but that none had been injured. The coup has affected CONIMCHH's assistance programs because the de facto regime has prohibited international fund transfers to CONIMCHH. The Rainbow Association, which advocates for rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (GLTB) community, told Poloff and DRL Deskoff that the gay community by and large opposed the coup and that there had been an increased disregard since the coup for the protection of vulnerable groups, including the GLTB community. End Summary.

Garifuna Protestor Beaten by Honduran Military

[2.](#) (C) On October 17, Poloff and DRL Deskoff spoke with 18-year-old Luis Norales in the Garifuna village of Sambo Creek, Atlantida Department. Norales participated in what he described as a peaceful anti-coup protest in front of the US Embassy on October 7 (ref A). He mentioned that other members of the Garifuna community as well as persons from the Lenca indigenous community and various other groups participated in the march. Norales asserted that he did not

throw rocks or take any action to provoke police (Note: Post observed this demonstration in front of the Embassy and could see a small number of protestors throw rocks after the police sprayed tear gas). Norales said that after police threw tear gas bombs at the crowd amidst which Norales was standing, a member of the Honduran military pursued him on foot (Norales claims he was able to tell the perpetrator was military and not police based on the camouflage uniform). Norales told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that this soldier told him "you are a black guy that should be playing a drum" and proceeded to kick him to the ground and hit him in the stomach and face (Poloff and DRL Deskoff could see visible scars above Norales' left eye and on both knees).

13. (C) Norales said that following the blows and kicking, he was shot in the lower back by a rubber bullet (Norales showed Poloff and DRL Deskoff the alleged injury above his tailbone, which was dressed with bandages). Norales detailed how he was able to run away from the soldier who was hitting him and take refuge near a gas station close to the US Embassy. Norales said he was later treated for his injuries at the School Hospital in Tegucigalpa. Norales filed a complaint with Honduran human rights organization, the Committee for the Family of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) on October 7, pursuant to the recommendation of a leader of the Sambo Creek community.

Views on Coup from Garifuna Rights Organizations

14. (C) On October 15, DRL Deskoff and Poloff met in La Ceiba with the largest Garifuna rights organization, Development

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Organization for the Ethnic Community (ODECO). Celio Alvarez, the president of ODECO, explained that his organization, which represents the Garifuna and other members of the Afro-descendent community in Honduras, publically opposed the decrees enacted by the de facto regime limiting civil liberties (See Reftels D,E, AND F), supported the San Jose Accords, and called for a restoration of the constitutional order. Alvarez was critical of President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, saying that he had failed to fulfill various promises to the Afro-descendant community, but that nonetheless he should not have been removed from office. ODECO's position, according to Alvarez, is that the best solution is a "third option," in which Micheletti and Zelaya would step down and a third person would take over running the government.

15. (C) Alvarez expressed his organization's reservations about President Zelaya's proposal for an opinion poll on a constituent assembly. In May, ODECO held a forum to discuss and inform the Garifuna community about the issue and its implications on their welfare. A basic concern in these discussions was whether the Garifuna should promote a proposal that they did not completely understand. Alvarez described the constituent assembly as a "boat with a known captain, but with unknown cargo and an unknown destination." Alvarez said that ODECO was the only NGO in Honduras to hold a public dialogue to discuss the ramifications of a constituent assembly, particularly in relation to poor and historically marginalized groups.

16. (C) DRL Deskoff and Poloff met in La Ceiba on October 16 with representatives of another Garifuna rights organization, the Fraternal Black Honduran Organization (OFRANEH). Miriam Miranda and Jerson Selvin of OFRANEH said that their organization fully supported President Zelaya's proposed constituent assembly, opposed the coup d'etat, and supported Zelaya's restitution and the return of the constitutional order. Miranda said that OFRANEH members supported the idea of a constituent assembly, because this offered them a role in making changes to improve the socio-economic and political conditions in the country, especially for marginalized groups. Miranda told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that she did not think many OFRANEH members would vote in the November

elections and she characterized as dangerous holding elections without the restitution of Zelaya.

¶7. (SBU) Miranda said that the coup had created uncertainty and panic within the Garifuna community. She alleged that she had seen the police arrest persons in La Ceiba for violating the curfew, but said she did not see the police beat anyone for these violations. Miranda told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that approximately 50 Garifuna members of OFRANEH had participated in past anti-coup demonstrations in Tegucigalpa, and that her organization had documented 12 Garifuna community members that had been detained and later released by police. Miranda participated in one anti-coup protest in Tegucigalpa on August 12, during which she said she saw no protestors throwing stones or other materials. She told Poloff and DRL Deskoff that during that protest, a Honduran National Police officer yelled at her, "What are you doing in Tegucigalpa? You blacks have no right to enter Tegucigalpa; you should be on the North Coast!"

¶8. (C) ODECO and OFRANEH differed in their response to allegations that the Honduran military and police have been harassing a Garifuna hospital near Ciriboya outside of Trujillo, Colon Department (ref B). Celio Alvarez of ODECO opined that in the current polarized environment it could be possible that someone would "create news" about themselves for ulterior motives (Note: there is controversy within the Garifuna community over a high profile leader that obtained political asylum in the United States. End Note). However, OFRANEH's Miriam Miranda told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that police and military had pressured and harassed hospital staff since the coup. Post continues to investigate all allegations of harassment of the hospital. Wendy Perez, the administrator of the hospital, told Poloff on September 17 that the hospital had not received any intimidation as of that date.

Indigenous Chorti Views on the Coup

¶9. (SBU) On October 19, DRL Deskoff and Poloff met in San
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Pedro Sula with five representatives of the indigenous group the National Chorti Council of Honduras (CONIMCHH) from the Department of Copan (ref C). They said the Chorti community opposed the coup d'etat and demanded the return of constitutional order. The CONIMCHH representatives told DRL Deskoff and Poloff they supported President Zelaya because he is the democratically elected president, and also because his government was viewed in a positive light due to its cooperation with the Chorti community. Elder Regaldo, Projects Coordinator for CONIMCHH, explained that the organization did not make a formal declaration with regard to Zelaya's idea to hold a constituent assembly, and had not yet fully analyzed the proposal. CONIMCHH was scheduled to discuss the organization's position on holding the general election scheduled for November 29 at their next meeting on October 31.

¶10. (SBU) The CONIMCHH representatives said that since the coup, the indigenous Chorti community has participated in five anti-coup protests and that on September 27, police briefly detained 13 members of the Chorti community during an anti-coup protest. They said, however, that none of the Chorti protestors had been injured or charged. The CONIMCHH representatives told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that the coup had drastically affected the group's educational and other assistance programs in addition to halting a land reparations program that was operating under the Zelaya Administration to return community land to the Chorti. Elder Regaldo, project coordinator for CONIMCHH, told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that in one case, Atlantida Bank told CONIMCHH that the de facto authorities had given strict orders prohibiting any further international funds transfers to CONIMCHH until the bank had determined the origin and intended use of the funds.

This order has vitiated a substantial flow of funding for CONIMCHH activities. Elder asserted that this order was issued to intimidate his organization and to assure that CONICHH would not use any of the funds for anti-coup protests.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community

¶11. (SBU) On October 14, DRL Deskoff and Poloff met with David Brown, a human rights advocate working with the Tegucigalpa-based GLTB rights group, "Rainbow Association" (ARCOIRIS). Brown explained that ARCOIRIS had not found any link between recent deaths of members of the GLTB community and the political crisis. Brown stated that the gay community by and large opposed the coup and has been active in anti-coup protests.

¶12. (SBU) Brown told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that he believed vulnerable groups in Honduras, including the GLTB community, had seen an increased, and at times willful, disregard for their protection. He noted that since the coup the authorities were allocating even less personnel and other resources to ensure what little protection the gay community enjoyed before June 28. As an example, Brown explained to DRL Deskoff and Poloff that before June 28, the Center for Prevention and Education in Health, Sex, and HIV/AIDS (CEPRESS) in San Pedro Sula had been given police protection due to a violent incident in 2008 involving the killing of one of their members. Brown showed the log of police visits to the group's office, which clearly showed that after June 28, the police protection dwindled, and that by early July, was no longer provided. Brown did not think that the de facto regime had a policy to attack LGBT people. He noted, however, that rogue security force operatives who have a personal antipathy toward gays have been able to harass and assault sexual minorities with greater impunity due to a lack of de facto regime interest or resources to follow up and investigate these abuses.

¶13. (SBU) Brown also told DRL Deskoff and Poloff that on September 22, a group of LGBT community members was returning in a vehicle from an anti-coup protest in Tegucigalpa when police stopped the vehicle and physically and verbally assaulted them. Brown stated that during the encounter, police uttered disparaging homophobic comments. Brown later confirmed that the car was driven by Osmin David Valle Castillo, project coordinator for LGBT organization "The Association of Youth in Movement" (AJEM).

Comment

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¶14. (C) Although the indigenous and other minority groups differ on Zelaya's proposal for a constituent assembly, how to solve the political crisis, and how to approach elections, they all agree on the importance of restoring the democratic order, and have actively participated in anti-coup protests. The experience of these groups, and that of Garifuna Luis Nerales in particular, underscores that the country's minority communities are very concerned about the de facto regime's use of force and other measures that have impacted negatively on respect of their human rights.
LLORENS